

***Submission to the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce (NALWT) In Reply to Stakeholders Meeting – Cairns September 3, 2009***

***By: The Mitchell River Watershed Management Group Inc  
September 2009***

***Background***

A notice was placed in local newspapers about 2 weeks before the September 3 meeting date. The notice called for interested parties to attend a *Water Workshop* or send in submissions to the *Taskforce* by September 16, 2009. The Mitchell River Watershed Management Group is a not for profit natural resource management body with the area of interest defined in the *Taskforce* charter.

***Limited Time to Respond***

***The Taskforce's Terms of Reference and general scope is rather large to say the least. To address the main issues presented in the TOR and at the workshop requires considerable time and effort. The Mitchell Group has a catchment management plan – The Mitchell River Watershed Management Plan 2000, found on our website [www.mitchell-river.com.au](http://www.mitchell-river.com.au). Responses to the TOR can be found within that plan however, the plan is presently being updated and some priorities will change.***

***The Mitchell Group is not too sure of the thoroughness of the Taskforce study and investigation of the northern catchments and the Mitchell in particular. In spite of this apparent lack of depth in the Taskforce study, we offer our contribution in the hope it will actually serve us well for our time and resources invested.***

***Opportunities***

***Opportunities are limited due to a lack of basic information in all areas.***

- ***Irrigated pasture in strategic locations***
- ***Niche crops and speciality food items***
- ***Replacement of transported food items for local use***
- ***Controlled tourism activities***

***Constraints to Development and Recommendations for Action***

***The Mitchell catchment is the size of Tasmania with population below 50,000. The levels of knowledge and skills is extremely varied. Communication and general capacity to engage in water planning***

**exercises is very limited and cost of engaging corresponding high. Further capacity to develop the required skills. In general:**

- ***There is still a fundamental lack of knowledge about water systems – particularly surface and groundwater interactions – the use of modelling is based on assumptions and may lead to significant future problems if water use is based on such existing models. There is a need for further research to improve use and management. The Draft Mitchell Resource Operational Plan is still pending but it is a basic document with limited detail.***
- ***Fundamental knowledge gaps in land capability and crop suitability. Lack of good reliable baseline information to make informed decisions in large areas of the catchment.***
- ***There is a need to access and integrate local and Indigenous knowledge, graziers and farmers who have been on their land a long time have knowledge, understanding and insights that cannot be captured by measuring scientific data. The challenge: how to tap into this knowledge through existing/new planning and decision making process.***
- ***Critical challenge: how to deal with the uncertainty of climate change and predictable higher oil costs.***
- ***Lack of knowledge in most aspect of river and estuarine ecology, from primary sources of productivity in the food web to environmental flows required to maintain freshwater, estuarine and Gulf fisheries.***
- ***Consultation process issues – timeframes for community input inadequate and present an additional burden on groups already with limited time/resources eg .development proposals, water extraction permits, NALWT submission processes; NALWT failure to meet with and engage community in the Gulf region ie.the water forum should really have been out in the catchment not in Cairns; ongoing work in the north must provide sufficient resourcing for NRM and community groups to effectively participate.***
- ***Cumulative management of development impacts – need to reform existing processes to address cumulative impacts, particularly important for any expansion of agricultural activity that does not come through the EIS process, also however important as an overall tool to assess sustainable use at a catchment or regional level from all types of development mining, agriculture, tourism, aquaculture etc..***

### **Threats**

- ***The greatest threat is perceived as ill conceived, unsustainable projects that serve to disrupt, and in some case destroy markets and overexploitation of natural resources, eg over allocation of water entitlements.***
- ***Weeds and feral animals***

- ***Unrestrained, ad hoc tourist access to rivers, waterholes, stations and other private property.***
- ***Further deterioration of road infrastructure by tourists and any increased activity like mining***
- ***Large scale mining.***

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